OGOPOGO: CANADA'S LOCH NESS MONSTER

Hundreds of witnesses — and a number of photographs — testify to the presence of a large serpentlike creature in the waters of British Columbia's Lake Okanagan.

By Mary Moon

SINCE THE 18th Century scary stories have been coming from the shores of narrow 80-mile-long Okanagan Lake in the interior of southern British Columbia, Canada's Pacific Coast province. For hundreds of years the Okanakane Indians quaked at the very sight of a tiny island off Squally Point at the lake's big bend. This was the traditional home of a huge serpentlike creature they worshiped as a water god and called *N'ha-ha-itkh*, "sacred creature of the water." No Indian in his right mind would venture onto the lake without taking along a small pig, dog or chicken as a sacrifice.

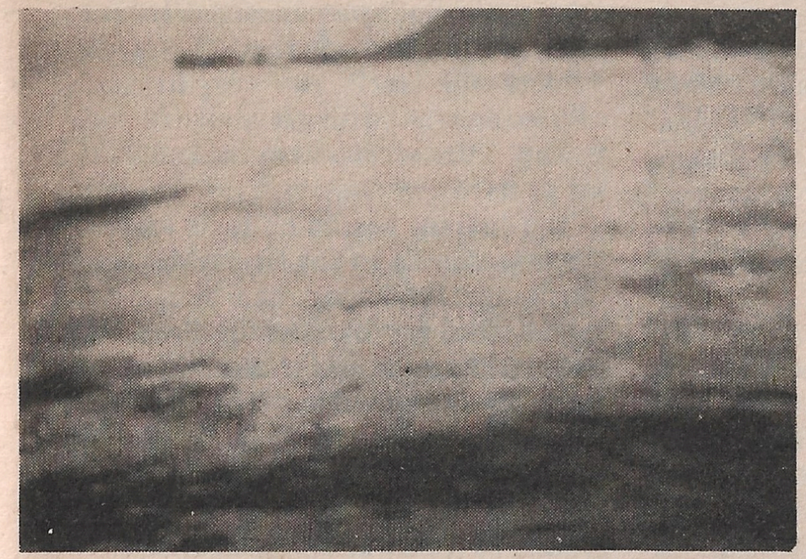
Naturally the Indians had a legend about someone who refused to follow this custom. Foolish Chief Timbasket had brought his family north from what is today Washington State where the southern Okanakane Indians lived. Visiting Westbank halfway up the lake where an Indian settlement has always stood, Timbasket found the local Indians making "big medicine." He watched scornfully as his hosts painted mystic signs on the prows of their dugout canoes and collected

sacrificial animals before paddling down the lake to their permanent camp *Penk-tn* or "always place."

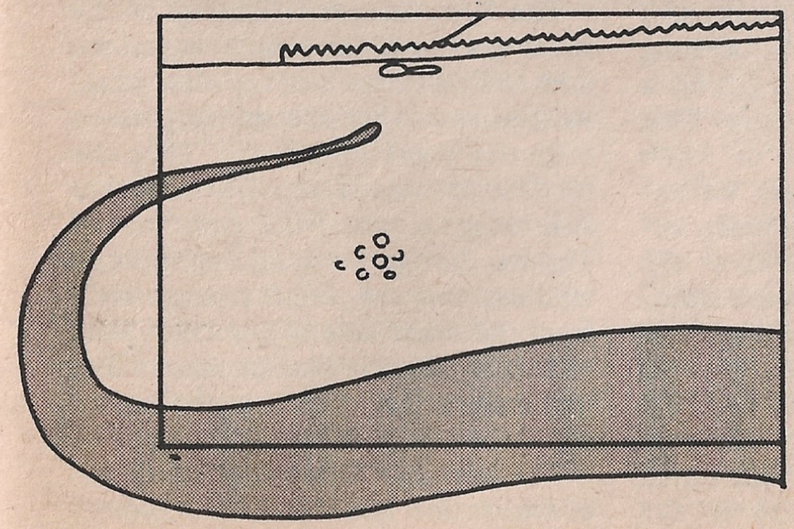
While passing Squally Point the Westbank Indians traveled at what they hoped was a safe distance from the island. Timbasket deliberately paddled close to shore, to show he was above such outmoded nonsense.

Suddenly *N'ha-ha-itkh* rose from his underwater cave and lashed the lake into a storm with his tail, swamping Timbasket's canoe. He and his family never were seen again. The shattered canoe was found years later on the shore by some Indians who were stalking deer.

Even in the 1860's half-breed John MacDougall knew better than to take his team of horses across The Narrows without providing a tasty gift for the water god. But on one particular day the animals fought so hard against entering the waters they had often swum before that MacDougall just plain forgot. Halfway across the lake some-



Ed Fletcher's photograph shows Ogopogo's huge body in the foreground, curving under the boat. The front part of the creature's body and head can be seen in the left background. Witnesses described head as 2½ feet long and snakelike.



This drawing depicts more clearly what the picture reveals. The creature is seen swimming toward a boat carrying a waterskier. Fletcher says Ogopogo looks like "a garter snake blown up to 70 or 75 feet long" but doesn't swim like a snake.

thing powerful began pulling the two horses down and down. When the canoe began to sink too MacDougall whipped out his hunting knife and cut the ropes. The lake demon had struck again, he told everyone. (Among the many names given the lake creature by the Indians was *Ook-ook mis-achie coupa lake*. In Chinook, the common language of the Pacific Northwest in the 18th Century, this meant "the wicked one in the lake.")

About 10 years later, in the 1870's, MacDougall told his frightening story to the first white woman settler on the west shore, pioneer rancher Mrs. Susan Allison. Fascinated, Mrs. Allison began to study the Indian culture. Later she set into verse a chilling legend about a party of Indians who perished while fishing near Squally Point. The refrain of the long poem, published in 1901, ran:

Far westward on the Island
The grim island all men dread,
Their bones lie bare and bleaching
On the rocks all stained with red.

Mrs. Louise Gilbert, Indian writer in Penticton, said huge carvings of *N'ha-ha-itkh* adorned both ends of a ceremonial dugout canoe, 18 feet long and five feet wide, built as a gift for a local chief in the 18th Century. This was long before the *sa-ma* or white man came into the Okanagan Valley, she said. In those days her tribe occupied land all the way down to the Columbia River in Washington state.

Okanagan Valley Indians were still in awe of *N'ha-ha-itkh* and making sacrifices to him in the middle 1920's, I was told by Leslie L. Kerry, founder of the *Capital News* in Kelowna, largest (52,000 population) of the three cities around the lake.

The water creature still inspired terror even in the early 1950's. Historian Frank Morgan Buckland wrote that an old Indian woman on a Kelowna street ran into a white resident whose family gave her clothing. Her benefactor began to question her about the water god but she seemed afraid of the subject. Whereupon the man said he would just have to take his boat down to Squally Point and see if *N'ha-ha-itkh* was home.

"No, no, no!" screamed the Indian woman, "you can't do that!"

"And why not?"

"Because he will get you and eat you up. Then what will my old man do for pants?"

The Indians passed on their fear of the lake demon to the first white settlers in the 1860's and the whites went so far as to patrol Mission Creek to protect their homes from anything emerging from the lake. The fear was reinforced in the 1870's by tales told by the Indians who waited for days among the white settlers to have grain ground at Kelowna's first flour mill.

The first recorded sighting of the water god by white people was in the mid-1870's. After a storm Mrs. Susan Allison saw what she thought was a huge tree trunk in the lake. Then she realized it was a reptilian creature swimming *against wind and current*. Thomas Smitheram, a mining superintendent, saw the same strange sight from the other side of the lake. Both tellers of this, the first of many "logs that came alive" stories, were laughed at.

The second "living log" story occurred in the late 1880's. An elderly

Scot visiting his son at Ewing's Landing was dismayed by a "log" that moved ahead of his boat faster than he could row. "What kind of beasties do ye hae in this loch, laddie?" he asked on his return to shore.

In the summer of either 1899 or 1900, a child of 10 — now Mrs. Ruth Richardson of Cashmere, Wash. — was terrified by a water creature which stared at her, approached much nearer and stared some more. The child fled indoors.

H. B. D. Lysons, fishing near Squally Point in the early 1900's, was dragged part way round Rattlesnake Island by something he never saw. (An Indian would have cut his line at once and let the presence below have his catch.)

Unknown artists of the Okanakane tribe have left us some pictographs to show what the water god looked like. Mrs. Primrose Upton sketched two fading red ocher paintings near Okanagan Centre in June 1965. Her sketch shows a horselike head, one hump — more recent sighters have counted three to five humps — and a forked tail. Another creature is shown stealing away through the weeds in the background. Another Indian rock painting is described in the writings of historian Frank Buckland. I personally saw an Indian pictograph on November 2, 1977, on a lakeside cliff at Westbank. Unfortunately, modern blasting operations have caused the middle of the picture to fall down.

The water monster received the new name Ogopogo when an English music hall song with that title became popular in the Okanagan Valley in 1926. Ogopogo he has been ever since to

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Caucasians, who have difficulty pronouncing the Indian names.

He is named in both Okanagan and English on the official British Columbia government marker beside Highway 97 (Mexico to Alaska) opposite Squally Point. The text reads: "OGOPOGO'S HOME: Before the unimaginative, practical white man came the fearsome lake monster *N'ha-ha-itkh* was well known to the primitive, superstitious Indians. His home was believed to be a cave at Squally Point and small animals were carried in the canoes to appease the serpent. Ogopogo still is seen each year — but now by white men!"

At Vernon, the city at the head of the lake, Ogopogo's serpentlike shape appears as a fountain in the park. His

official statue at Ogopogo Corner in Kelowna is painted green, with a forked red tongue, pointed ears, horns and dorsal fins. Beside the statue is a sign saying his story is centuries old, that he may be as long as 70 feet, may have a horse's head and is protected by law. "Look but don't touch" has long been the warning given by Okanagan officials to Ogopogo watchers.

Some have literally hunted and even shot at him, alas. In September 1925 hunting parties were formed in six Pacific Coast centers, including university campuses in Washington and California. In 1926 British Columbia newspapers reported various parties of young men with rifles were gathering at the lake. In August that year Joe Spurrier of Kelowna took aim at Ogopogo but didn't fire when he noticed that a summer cottage was in the way.

Andy Paul, grand council chief of the North American Indian Brotherhood, stated in July 1949 that an Ogopogo had been killed by his ancestor-namesake *Te Qoitchetahl,* "the serpent slayer."

Later that month three youths working in an orchard at Carr's Landing saw Ogopogo three times in one afternoon. John Berebow fired a shot at the creature in jest, to make Cecil Keddy and Rexford S. Marshall laugh. Attorney General Gordon S. Wismer was not amused, however, and pointed out that Section 26 of the British Columbia Fisheries Act protects Ogopogo.

There are few pictures of Ogopogo. The first serious attempt to capture Ogopogo on film was made on Saturday, July 23, 1977, when 60 volunteer divers from various parts of western Canada converged on Westbank for an all-night vigil. Led by Cal and Lorraine Bevans, owners of a Kelowna scuba diving school, they took turns waiting 20 to 30 feet below the surface in an animal cage borrowed from a local game farm. High-powered aircraft landing lights illumined a wide area around the cage to make photography possible at that depth. A camera crew from CHBC-TV, Kelowna, led by Terry Mahoney, Keith Williams and Warren Reid, made a half-hour documentary of the whole venture.

About 2:30 A. M. a small log with branches drifted by and caused great excitement but the shy serpent of Okanagan Lake never showed his coils. This may have been due to a too-noisy generator which was used for power and to a large noisy crowd which watched from the shore. Ogopogo is easily frightened by loud noises, it is said. Mahoney and Bevans intend to organize another vigil in the summer of 1978 — on a smaller, quieter scale.

One man who has successfully photographed Ogopogo is Edward Fletcher of Vancouver, B. C. He took five color pictures of the lake monster on August 3, 1976, at Westbank, between 1:00 and 2:00 P. M. In the summer of 1977 he took 25 photographs in the same bay and 18 of them showed the creature's unusual swimming patterns. It moves with a flattened spiral motion.

"A garter snake blown up to 70 or 75 feet" is Fletcher's description of what he saw first in 1976. He spotted "a strange wave" of the kind reported

so many times at Westbank during the past 100 years. (I saw one myself during the filming of a television segment *In Search of Ogopogo,* based on my book *The Okanagan Mystery: Ogopogo,* on November 3, 1977, between 4:00 and 5:00 P. M.)

Fletcher knew what the strange wave signified, having seen Ogopogo from a distance of 15 feet just minutes before. This time he had his camera with him. He shut off the engine and began shooting pictures as the creature swam and submerged.

Filming the huge bubbles left behind when Ogopogo dived, Fletcher captured on film a disturbing giant shadow in the water. When developed the photograph showed Ogopogo's great length underneath the boat, with its long neck and blunt snakelike head raised in the distance.

During the summer of 1977 the Fletcher family, the Gary Slaughters and their friends saw Ogopogo so many times they "lost count between 30 and 40." Their good luck is thought to be due to the fact that Fletcher's high speed runabout gives off electricity which attracts fish. During the first week of July 1977 "a group of stunned, stupid trout" followed his boat to shore and tickled his ankles as he stood in shallow water washing off the exhaust soot. One mesmerized fish did not struggle even when he picked it up and then put it back in the water.

Like many other people, the Fletcher and Slaughter families *know* there is more than one Ogopogo because they have seen more than one. The two families saw *two* Ogopogos in Westbank Bay on August 3, 1976. Two Ogopogos were seen in the same place on July 2, 1977, by Diane Fletcher, Jodi Lee and John Hamilton. That same afternoon Hamilton again saw a pair of huge serpents.

Gordon Radcliffe, bus driver and nondrinker, and his 15 passengers saw two creatures chasing each other near Summerland on June 29, 1950. Radcliffe commented, "Whoever heard of there being only one of any living creature?"

Donald M. Nourse, another bus driver, saw four "things" 10 to 20 feet long at Penticton early on a February morning in 1948. He alerted his boss Hugh Wilson and two friends Katherine and Crawford Forman to watch the "Ogopups," as the local newspaper called them later. All his bus passengers were cheerful about being late to work.

The Leslie Kerrys of Kelowna, their neighbors Dr. and Mrs. Stanley Underhill and several youngsters all saw two Ogopogos on July 2, 1949. A pair of Ogopogos swimming in line were spotted by William Marx near Kelowna in August 1958.

A number of witnesses think the Ogopogos have feet and can walk on land. The small son of H. Faulkner of Kelowna ran home with the story of huge footprints on the beach in July 22, 1949. His father examined six cup-shaped prints, six inches wide, which emerged from and reentered the water. Jack J. Fuhr found elephantine footprints around his wharf at Okanagan Landing on April 28, 1960. Some were six inches deep in firm sand where a human foot made little impression.

Albert J. Moore, who saw Ogopogos three times in the 1950's near West-

bank, believes they have short legs because of the three-foot-high foam they kick up when swimming away at high speed. Candace McDougald of Peachland found tracks on a beach where she had seen an Ogopogo partly out of the water. Twenty people watched an Ogopogo near his statue in Kelowna on February 22, 1970. Some were sure he was kicking with four feet.

Some brave people have chased Ogopogo and others have been chased by him. Cedric McNair Stringer and Vic Cowley, sport fishermen from Kelowna, chased an Ogopogo off Bear Creek on May 19, 1951, but lost him. Three youths — James Shelley, Bob Derker and Jerry Huffman — pursued him off Kelowna on July 9, 1957, and came within 25 feet of him, close enough to see his dorsal fins.

Sheri Campbell of Kelowna came closer still when she met an Ogopogo on July 23, 1968, while waterskiing north of Kelowna. She told me she panicked. "I had no idea where his mouth was!" She dropped the rope and her companions — Willie Walls, Bruce and Gwen Johnson and Rennee Bliss — pulled her into the boat. Then they chased Ogopogo and came within five feet of him before he put on a burst of speed their boat could not match.

Incidentally, while five feet is too close for comfort, the record for togetherness with an Ogopogo is three feet — arm's length. Erin Neely of North Vancouver, B. C., came that close while waterskiing at Westbank on July 2, 1977. She is tied for first place with Ernest A. Lording of Kelowna who said he could have jumped onto Ogopogo's back easily during one of his many sightings between 1955 and 1968.

Of the several people who have been pursued by an Ogopogo, all were shaken by the experience. Rita Bridges turned pale and almost fainted when an Ogopogo followed a rowboat in which she was riding near Westbank on July 10, 1949. She asked Louis Guidi, also of Kelowna, to pull for shore and he was glad to.

Two frightened girls of 14 in a motorized rowboat were followed in circles for 10 minutes by an Ogopogo on November 1, 1970. Still breathless and nervous, they told their story later that day to the *Kelowna Courier* staff but refused to give their names. Many eyewitnesses fear ridicule. Thus for every reported sighting there are scores unreported.

Although Mr. and Mrs. Dick Miller, Mr. and Mrs. Pat Marten and their son Murray were scared on July 17, 1959, when they realized an Ogopogo was following them, nevertheless they turned around and tried for a closer look. Not liking this broadside approach, Ogopogo dived.

On July 19, 1926, John L. Logie, lifelong nondrinker and pioneer settler in Summerland, "raced" an Ogopogo in an automobile at 30 m.p.h. for several miles along the west shore. With Logie were his wife Isabella and their grandchildren Catherine, 13, and Robert, 11. The race came to an end when the road went uphill and the water creature turned away from the shore. Afterwards Logie described a sea serpent 20 feet long, with a head that looked like a bulldog from the back and a sheep from the front. Mr. P. J. Dodwell of Summerland, whose car closely followed that of the Logies, witnessed the whole chase.

A baptismal party of 50 to 60 persons saw an Ogopogo at Westbank on November 18, 1926. And a church picnic attended by about 30 Kelowna parishioners saw an Ogopogo on July 29, 1962.

The newest witnesses to something strange in Okanagan Lake include Betty and Harry Staines of Westbank, who glimpsed an Ogopogo near the Okanagan Lake bridge on November 5, 1977. Stunned passengers in eight other cars also watched from the bridge. Dawsha Malove and Darryll Hunt, both of Peachland, supported the Staines' story. Newcomers to the valley, the Staines had not believed the Ogopogo stories until they saw their first one on July 17, 1976, near Peachland. Betty Staines watched Ogopogo through binoculars from a boat. She described "a long black eel, 35 to 40 feet long," which seemed to be right beside the boat. She was terrified that the creature would overturn them.

Just as being close enough to an Ogopogo to see the bony structure and dorsal fins terrified Mrs. Staines, the following possible fate of the Ogopogos terrifies me. North America's own Loch Ness-type mystery may come to an abrupt end within the next few years if the British Columbia government persists in its proposed plan to rid the lake of Eurasian water milfoil weeds by poisoning them.

In 1977 environmental groups and concerned individuals, including me, protested publicly against using the herbicide 2,4-D in the lake. Called Aqua-Kleen and manufactured by Amchem Products, Inc., of Ambler, Pa., this herbicide was used to defoliate trees in the Vietnam war. Heated arguments still rage in the Okanagan Valley for and against 2,4-D, which is known to cause cancer, birth defects and mutations.

Kelowna's city council has passed the motion that 2,4-D is not to be used in the lake until proven harmless to health and the environment. An adverse report on the herbicide by the South Okanagan Environmental Coalition was published in January 1978.

Another report, prepared by officials of the British Columbia ministry of recreation and conservation, says the use of 2,4-D to kill lake weeds is potentially detrimental to fish and waterfowl. The SOEC has declared its members will oppose the use of the herbicide by any means they can, including physical presence on the beaches in the spring and summer of 1978. They urge that the weeds be controlled by biological means, not chemical.

Alternative methods of dealing with the milfoil do exist. The weeds are fed by tons of treated sewage poured into the lake. It has been suggested that this effluent be sprayed on farmland as fertilizer instead. Also there are such things as weed-removing machines.

Despite all this, many acres of weeds will be treated with 2,4-D in 1978 and Jay Lewis of SOEC charges the government with ignoring Aqua-Kleen's label which warns: "Do not apply to waters used for irrigation, agricultural sprays, watering dairy animals or domestic water supplies."

Many residents fear their drinking

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water and the famous Okanagan Valley fruit will be poisoned. Others fear swimmers will be made ill, tourists frightened away and all wildlife destroyed . . . including the Ogopogos living in the depths of Okanagan Lake.

To me this seems the most frightening of all the stories to come out of the Okanagan Valley in the past three centuries.

WORDS OF THE BRAHAN SEER

By W. Ritchie Benedict

IN THE FIRST eight months of 1977, the number of deaths in Fortrose, Scotland, reached 42, according to William MacDonald, the local registrar. This is twice the average number occurring yearly in this small highland town. Anywhere else this statistic would probably be ignored but to many Fortrose residents, it is the fulfillment of another prediction by the highland prophet, Coinneach Odhar, the Brahan Seer. He lived in the 17th Century and was supposedly a retainer in the court of the Seaforths who were powerful local chieftains.

About 300 years ago the Brahan Seer handed down a whole series of predictions (vague and rambling, say the sceptics; very precise, say the believers). One of them promised that if a wedding were ever held in the ruins of the town's 13th-Century cathedral, "then the graveyards of Fortrose would overflow." In August 1975 Christine Cameron of Munlochy married English naval officer Charles Evans in the cathedral's romantic ruins. Since there is no other obvious reason for the rise in the death rate, Brahan believers point out that those who ignore his words do so at their own peril.

In nearby Strathpeffer, there is a Pictish stone called the "eagle stone" which was mentioned in the predictions. The Seer said that if it fell over three times it portended a dire future for the town. So far the stone has fallen over twice so nervous Strathpeffer residents have cemented it into place and surrounded it with barbed wire.

The Brahan Seer scored with his prediction of the opening of the Caledonian Canal ("The time will come when full rigged ships will be seen sailing by the back of Tomnahurich near Inverness") and the advent of the railway ("A black bridleless horse shall pass through the muir of Ord").

Elizabeth Sutherland, the author of a new edition of a book on the Brahan Seer's prophecies, adds, "In 1937 when the Inverness town council proposed a temporary bridge over the River Ness, someone wrote to the local newspaper pointing out that the Brahan Seer had said that when it was possible to cross the Ness dry-shod in five places, a terrible disaster would strike the world. Well, the bridge was put up at the end of August 1939 and a few days later Hitler marched into Poland." Obviously, it is one of the lesser known facts of recent history that the responsibility for starting the Second World War rests squarely with the Inverness town council.

Bernadine Villanueva . . .
Misunderstood Mystic or Clever Con Artist?

Part 1

"She said she had $27,000 coming for psyching out oil for the state of Georgia and would receive $55,000 for psyching out oil for the Shah of Iran . . . We thought she was rich."

By Jane Bandy

"LADIES and gentlemen of the jury, this case involves the use, or alleged use, of psychic power. Will that prejudice you in any way?" The 10 men and two women seated in the jury box shook their heads.

Thus began, on March 28, 1978, an eight-day fraud trial which would amuse and amaze readers and listeners served by Knoxville, Tenn., news media.

The prosecutors and alleged victims: Evelyn Sharp, 71, retired university teacher; Jane Swingle, 24, kindergarten teacher; and Doris Ivie, 33, college teacher.

The defendant: Bernadine Villanueva, 43, self-proclaimed prophetess, healer and psychic.

The charges: six citations of fraud involving grand larceny by fraudulent contract, grand larceny by fraudulent appropriation, and obtaining property by false pretenses.

* * *

THE STORY begins on Labor Day weekend in 1976. For several months before that Evelyn Sharp, Jane Swingle and Doris Ivie had been part of a loosely-knit group who wanted to start a center for metaphysical studies in Knoxville. They hoped to buy or rent a building to be used as a meeting place for classes in yoga, holistic